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CC:

Subject: Scranton Times-Tribune (4-7) EPA releases 20 new Dimock water test results

EPA releases 20 new Dimock water test results

By Laura Legere (Staff Writer)

Federal regulators found no health threats in a second round of water test results released Friday as part of an investigation in Dimock Twp. but said they plan to retest one well where they detected an elevated level of arsenic.

The Environmental Protection Agency determined that the 20 new results - like the first 11 released three weeks ago - "did not show levels of contaminants that would give EPA reason to take immediate action," spokesman Roy Seneca wrote in a statement.

View the data HERE

The agency has now released about half of the data collected from 61 homes between Jan. 23 and Feb. 15 during sampling in an area of Dimock where regulators are studying the potential impact of nearby natural gas drilling on water supplies.

Three of the 20 wells in this round of sampling - and one well in the first round - contained methane at levels higher than the point when it begins to seep out of water, creating a potential explosion risk in enclosed spaces. Three other wells in this round had methane at levels above the state's reporting limit.

Mr. Seneca said the EPA alerted the residents and state and local officials to methane levels above 28 milligrams per liter. Two of the wells were not connected to the homes because residents had been receiving alternate water from Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., the natural gas driller that the state found responsible for causing the gas migration. The two other homeowners said they were already aware of the high methane levels, he said.

The results released Friday also showed one well with barium above drinking water standards, but a reverse osmosis treatment system at the home reduced it to safe levels. Arsenic in another well exceeded safe drinking water standards in the raw water but was within the safe limit at the tap. Other wells contained sodium, lithium, bacteria and lead at levels that triggered an expedited toxicologist's review, but none was finally determined to pose a threat. Low levels of toluene, petroleum hydrocarbons, the plasticizer known as DEHP and other compounds were also detected in the water supplies.

The newest results were handed out to residents this week, and they were also shared with Pennsylvania regulators, Mr. Seneca said.

The EPA began testing water wells in a 9-square-mile area of Dimock in January after the agency's

review of past tests by the state and other groups raised concerns about contamination from Marcellus Shale drilling.

The rural township has been a key battleground in the debate over the safety of natural gas drilling since 2009, when state officials determined faulty Cabot gas wells allowed methane to seep into 18 Dimock water supplies - a finding Cabot and its supporters dispute.

Cabot spokesman George Stark said Friday that the new data "is consistent with literally thousands of pages of water-quality data accumulated by state and local authorities and by Cabot" that shows that the water is safe.

He said it is important to note that the EPA "again did not indicate that those contaminants that were detected bore any relationship to oil and gas development in the Dimock area," but Mr. Seneca said the EPA has not done any detailed review to determine the cause of any contaminants.

"Our focus is first and foremost on the drinking water quality," Mr. Seneca said. "Once all of the sample results are complete, we will conduct a comprehensive review to determine if there are any trends or patterns in the data as it relates to home well water quality."

Water Defense, an environmental organization that reviewed the new data, said the water in Dimock is flammable and contains chemicals associated with hydraulic fracturing, the gas extraction process in which chemically treated water is injected underground at high pressure to free the gas from shale.

"EPA's test results continue to show what Dimock residents have claimed for years: the water is contaminated," Water Defense executive director Claire Sandberg said.

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